DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 175 PS 028 109

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | Supporting Parents, Supporting Children: The Final Report of the Positive Parenting Project, 1999. |
| INSTITUTION | Save the Children Scotland, Edinburgh. |
| PUB DATE | 1999-10-00 |
| NOTE | 17p.; Funded by the National Lottery Charities Board. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Agency Cooperation; Child Rearing; *Cooperative Programs; *Family Programs; Foreign Countries; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Education; Parenting Skills; Pilot Projects; Program Descriptions; Social Services |
| IDENTIFIERS | Program Characteristics; *Save the Children Fund; Scotland |

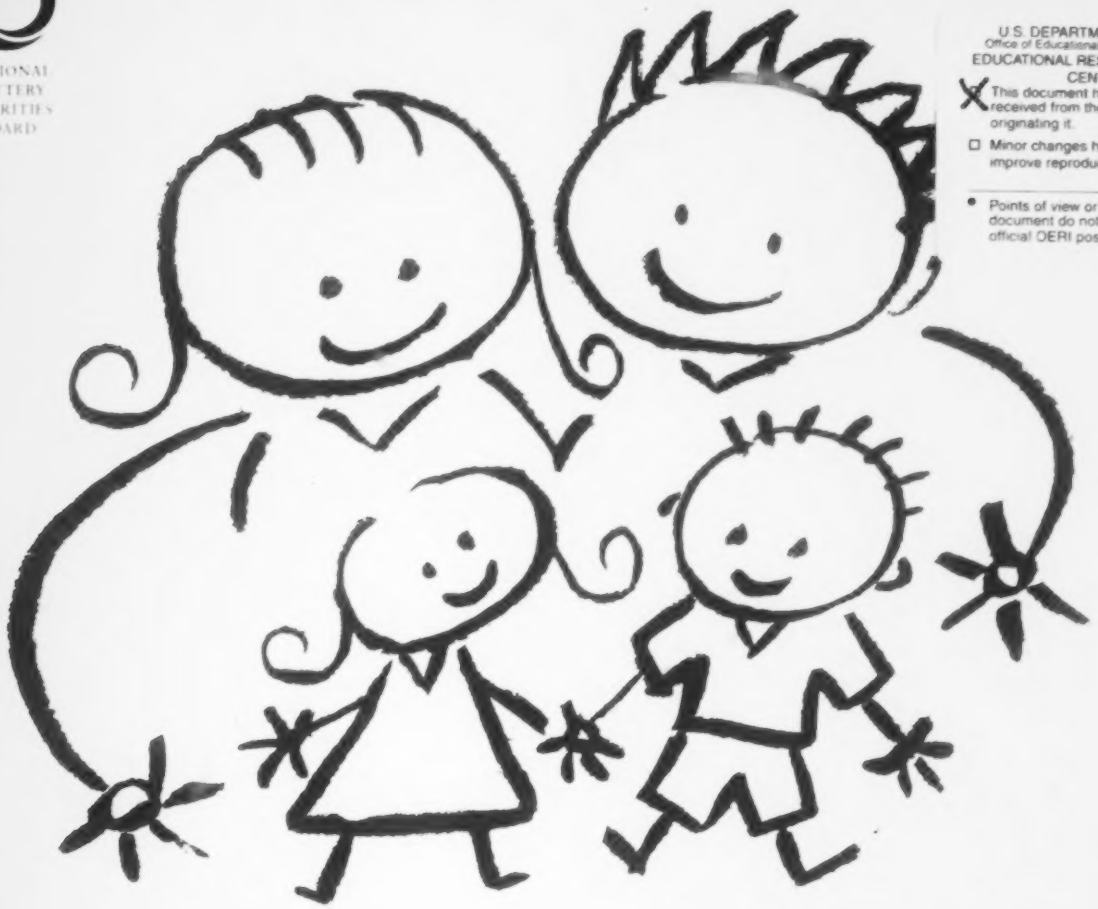
ABSTRACT

The Positive Parenting Project, developed by Scotland's Save the Children, has worked with children and families for 3 years to identify and develop structures to meet their needs for parenting support. The project, which works in collaboration with local organizations, consults widely with parents, young people, agencies, and organizations in order to develop appropriate structures and ensure that resources meet the real needs of parents. This final report describes the project's efforts and addresses the following topics pertaining to the project: (1) Where Do We Work?; (2) How Do We Work?; (3) What Do We Do?; (4) What Do These Mechanisms Provide?; (5) Who Do We Work With?; (6) What Have We Learned from This; What Works Well?; (7) What Works Well with Parents?; (8) Why Does This Approach to Support, Work Well with Parents?; (9) Other Important Factors in Providing Support; (10) Which Approaches Are Less Successful?; (11) How Do We Know That This Support Is Effective?; (12) What Do Parents Understand by Support?; (13) Approaches to Support; (14) Understanding Needs; (15) Flexible Support; (16) Informal Support; (17) Getting the Terminology Right; (18) How Do We Develop "Parenting Skills"?; and (19) How Did We Monitor and Evaluate Our Work? The report concludes by noting that the multi-layered collaborative approach used by the project has ensured the sustainability of many of the initiatives it created. (EV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

NATIONAL LOTTERY CHARITIES BOARD

ED 437 175



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Save the Children

# The Final Report of The Positive Parenting Project 1999

## Supporting Parents. Supporting Children

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elizabeth Cutting
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

PS 028109



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Save the Children's Positive Parenting Project has been working with children, young people, parents and families for three years, to identify and develop structures to meet their needs for parenting support. This National Lottery funded project has provided us with an in-depth knowledge of how parents view and understand support and has enabled us to develop a variety of mechanisms to meet those support needs.

We have consulted widely with parents and other organisations and listened to their views. Together we have successfully identified and addressed a range of support needs which parents in Scotland have today.

During this time we have also gained a much clearer understanding of what support means in practice, developing a model that has been endorsed by a large number of parents across Scotland. In this model, the emphasis is on understanding and meeting what parents identify as their needs and providing support which recognises and responds to both individual and general needs, as well as offering opportunities for personal and social development.

Family structure has changed dramatically over the last twenty years. Many parents today face the added difficulty of coping with the demands of raising children alone, working full time or adapting to the pressures which the breakdown of a relationship can lead to. Many parents also experience the effects of poverty, including the social isolation which can result.

Now more than ever before it is vital to develop effective help and advice for parents. Such support ensures that children and families receive the help they need to allow children to develop and reach their full potential.

Save the Children considers the provision of appropriate support to parents to be essential in ensuring that children's rights are actively being addressed.

In this way parents can be helped to become pro-active and powerful advocates on behalf of their children.

Elizabeth Cutting
National Co-ordinator
Positive Parenting Project

October 1999

## Where do we work?

We selected a number of different areas in Scotland to enable us to gather information and draw comparisons from a broad cross section of initiatives in supporting parents.

We work in disadvantaged areas with high levels of poverty, social isolation, poor health and inadequate resources to support vulnerable families living there. These include urban and rural areas in the following locations:

- Muirhouse - Greater Pilton, Edinburgh
- Niddrie - Craigmillar, Edinburgh
- Rosemount - Royston, Glasgow
- Blackburn,West Lothian
- Angus

Our work with parents living in these different areas has enabled us to draw conclusions about the main issues which all parents feel are important in terms of providing general support.

## How do we work?

Our approach to the work is to consult widely with parents, young people, agencies and organisations to develop appropriate structures. This ensures that resources are utilised and directed accordingly and, most importantly, meet the real needs of parents. This approach is highly successful, as parents feel valued and included in the developmental process. It also highlights the fundamental importance of involving parents when developing services for families.

Save the Children works in collaboration or in partnership with local agencies and community-based organisations. This enables us to take forward the principles of joint working in a way which maximises limited resources, draws on a range of expertise and experience and demonstrates the potential which such approaches offer.

As the project is only funded for 3 years, it is important that any support structures developed for parents are sustainable beyond the funding period.

By working in collaboration or partnership with others, the potential to ensure this sustainability has been maximised.

## What do we do?

In response to parents' needs across the Project we developed a range of different structures through which parents were able to access support:

- new groups for parents
- support to existing groups
- long-term support
- limited/short term support
- individual support
- one day workshops.

## What do these provide?

Through these different mechanisms we provide:

- information
- advice
- reassurance
- mutual support
- childcare
- opportunities for personal and social development.

## Who do we work with?

Our work with parents has generally avoided targeting any particular group.
We wanted to understand the essential elements of providing general support to vulnerable parents across a range of circumstances and geographical areas.

In the first year of the Project we consulted with over 350 parents and since then have had regular contact with approximately 200 parents and 150 children per month.

These parents range in age from young teens to early forties and have children ranging in age from newborn to late teens. The number of mums involved in the Project far exceeded the number of dads despite attempts to include all parents.

This highlights the need to do further work to understand the support needs of fathers as a group which, our experience suggests, is quite specific with regard to approach and delivery.

In terms of demographic information we found that collecting data in relation to marital status, employment or housing proved an impediment to encouraging parents to take up support opportunities. Many were reluctant to divulge such information, especially at the initial stages in securing support and felt that it was intrusive and irrelevant in terms of their needs.

We worked in disadvantaged communities and targeted support at families who most needed it. Vulnerable families were identified in collaboration with our partner agencies and through word of mouth, but all were voluntary participants, having identified that what we offered could help them with the various difficulties they were facing.

Support is thus related to and defined by the status of 'parent' and not by other circumstances.

It is essential to the development of parenting support that providers fully appreciate the reluctance many parents experience in seeking out support. Many view it a sign of failure and will need a lot of reassurance and encouragement.

Feedback from project workers indicated that the focus at the initial stages should be on the parents' immediate needs and circumstances and not on data collection. The emphasis is on developing support services to vulnerable families that no other agency is currently providing.

Play workers employed by the project, as well as crèche workers employed by local organisations, provided skilled childcare. Both parents and children were also involved in developing materials which could further parental understanding of children.

One important element of the project was providing courses promoting a greater understanding of parenthood for young people in the communities where we worked.

Twenty-seven young people aged 13 to 14 years were involved in preparation for parenthood courses. Another 60 young people are involved in producing a video about what life is like for adolescents and how this effects their relationship with their parents.

This video will be a useful resource for parents of adolescents who want support in developing the different skills they need to manage their children as they grow up.

## What have we learned from this, what works well?

By working with parents, children and young people and offering support which meets their needs, we have gained an insight into the issues which parents feel are important in terms of seeking out support.

We have learned that in general parents prefer support that is informal, flexible and meets their needs both as parents and as individuals. To provide support of this nature a number of principles have been identified as critical to the effectivness of this work.

## What works well with parents?

In terms of structuring support we identified the following principles:

- Facilitating and enabling parents to identify and address the issues that are important for them, their families and/or their community.
- Providing options and choices - meeting a variety of different but appropriate needs. Support must be relevant and recognise the various stages of parenting.
- Creating a relaxed and informal environment that makes for an enjoyable and social exchange.
- Providing parent centred support rather than an exclusively child centred focus.
- Providing quality childcare to enable parents to participate fully.

In terms of the worker's involvement in support the following points are important to parents:

- The focus should be on enabling and facilitating the support process, building on individual strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses
- The worker's role should be to act as a catalyst rather than leading or directing events.
- Demands should come from parents to workers - not workers to parents.
- Parents need workers to be dependable and deliver what is agreed.
- Parents value workers taking on an intermediary or brokering role between parents and other organisations in the community.

## Why does this approach to support work well with parents?

It works well for the following reasons:

- Parents are valued stakeholders in the whole process.
- By sharing and agreeing an agenda, workers and parents become equal stakeholders.
- Parents and participants have ownership of the process and content, which makes the work more likely to be sustained.
- This approach helps parents to move from dependence to independence.
- It also helps to raise confidence levels and self-esteem.

## Other important factors in providing support:

- Parents are generally reluctant to seek out support and many need encouragement to do so. A key contact, such as a health visitor or teacher, can act as a bridge to such support.
- Support must be responsive to changing needs and should adapt accordingly.
- Parents derive a great deal of support from other parents and the potential for developing mutual support opportunities is vital.

Support which aims to build on existing skills and seeks to empower parents is more likely to achieve success in terms of meeting support needs, than support which aims to 'teach' parents in a more formal way.

## Which approaches are less successful?

In general, parents do not favour a curriculum based approach to support which offers a defined, time limited programme with few opportunities to influence the agenda. Many parents are reluctant to commit to such support because they feel under pressure to attend regularly and find that the content may not be what they require.

Parents lacking confidence may find structured parenting courses to be too formal in their delivery and may be deterred by assessments of their skills as parents. We have found that formal programmes of this nature may be supported at the initial stages, but tend to experience high drop out rates.

In certain circumstances, where groups of parents with similar specific needs require support, a more structured approach may be effective.

In Rosemount, we provided support to parents attending a drug rehabilitation unit. These parents had very specific parenting support needs in relation to their situation and their relationship with their children. Many had lost contact or were anxious to retain contact. In this case a structured programme was agreed to be appropriate, given the nature of the group and the difficulties they faced.

The key element in successful parenting support is that it is relevant to the individual circumstances of the parents involved. Project staff worked closely with local organisations and parents in identifying the most appropriate locations, times and approaches for the support we developed.

## How do we know that this support is effective?

By regular consultation with parents and responding to their needs we have been able to monitor their views and opinions over a substantial period of time. The model of support we have developed has also been successfully replicated across the Project with different parents in different areas.

All of our work has been carefully recorded, reviewed and evaluated to ensure that we shared good practice across the project and with our partners. Our aim has been to positively benefit parents across Scotland through sharing experiences, our mistakes and successes. We have also disseminated these findings to other organisations through the publication of regular reports and newsletters.

## What do parents understand by support?

Through supporting parents we have also become aware of how parents perceive and react to different support opportunities. At the early stages of the Project we had to work to overcome a range of barriers as many parents frequently associated parenting support with being labelled 'bad parents'.

Working with and listening to parents has allowed us to develop a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions involved in developing and providing support and the importance of developing 'parent friendly' definitions and understandings of some of the key terms which currently surround these issues.

Language can sometimes act as a barrier to both discussing and developing support for parents. Language can carry with it values, ideas and beliefs which embrace different perspectives and approaches. These differences can be reflected in the meanings and significance we attach to words which can impact on our ability to communicate clearly.

It is therefore imperative that we understand how parents define some of the key terms in use in discussing support to prevent the ambiguity that can arise between parents and professionals.

As stated earlier we found that parents want support which meets their needs and which is both informal and flexible. These key terms require a closer examination in relation to how parents understand them.

## Support

We have found that there are two distinct approaches to support.

- Support is seen very strongly as a participative emergent process, which builds on individual strengths, rather than an activity or action that is delivered or provided to parents.

  Parents view it a sharing and learning experience, which allows them to actively participate in terms of talking to and listening to others, especially parents, and having a clear role in identifying their requirements. This implies a dynamic, interactive, needs led aspect to support, the precise nature of which depends very much on those to whom it is being offered.

  This type of support is very general in its nature with its shape very much dependent on those involved. It also provides opportunities for self-help which is fundamental to the developmental approach.

- Support also refers to more practical elements such as childcare, information, advice, crisis intervention and advocacy in negotiating or mediating with others on behalf of parents. This form of support can be linked to stages or key events and therefore tends to be more transitional in nature. It can be triggered by a specific need at a particular point in time or by a crisis or some sort.

Support for individual parents may therefore encompass elements of both the above at different points in time. This clearly demonstrates the need to view it as a dynamic concept and the importance of being able to respond accordingly to individual situations.

## Understanding Needs

For many parents, especially those experiencing economic or social disadvantage and isolation, the opportunity to explore and understand their support needs is frequently the essential first step towards articulating and communicating those needs to others. However, some parents may be reluctant to do this and may need encouragement.

In such cases we have found that the input provided by health visitors is invaluable in encouraging vulnerable or reluctant parents to attend a parent group.

The term 'need' has a number of implications:

- Needs can refer to a personal, individual or family difficulty in relation to particular issues or situations. This can be characterised by individual difficulties in managing a specific personal situation, or more generally to difficulties in their community that impact on the individual in a certain way.

  For many parents, some basic needs are not properly met and this can have a direct impact on their ability to adequately provide for their children.

- Many parents also characterise their needs in terms of a lack of experience, or inadequate access to information about an area or subject in relation to their parenting role. They view the acquisition of this information as instrumental in fulfilling or meeting that need.

## Flexible Support

Flexibility in supporting parents depends on a number of essential elements being present.

- Parents want to have a choice about support and to play a key role in setting the agenda. It must be relevant to the locality or community and must be adaptable to accommodate changing needs. Consultation is thus a key part of this process, as it allows parents to have some control over developments and a greater sense of ownership and commitment.

- Flexible support structures should aim to be a learning process for all those involved, but it must also be reflective to ensure that it adapts to change and accommodates diversity.

## Informal Support

For support to be considered 'informal' the following usually applies:

- Parents value support that is voluntary, freely chosen and delivered in a relaxed and safe environment. Parents attend as they wish with no element of compulsion or pressure. Active participation is encouraged, but is responsive to different levels of participation.

- The nature of the relationship between parents and those providing support is one of equality and equal opportunity. Parents negotiate the agenda with workers and there is freedom of movement within the group.

Support provided through 'drop-in' sessions, where parents can drop in when they wish, provides many of the elements which parents feel comfortable with and can be used in a variety of ways.

- Drop-in sessions can provide information, advice and opportunities to meet others.

- A support worker does not always have to be present, and such sessions can still provide the opportunity to identify further support needs in the community.

## Getting the terminology right

Invariably parents preferred the term 'group' to 'class' or 'programme'. The latter terms are viewed negatively because they imply, or are associated with, a parenting deficit or some kind. Parents are anxious about negative labelling and the social stigma that is associated with the term 'parenting class' is widespread.

Terminology can have an impact on how parents perceive potential support and they can easily be deterred despite the fact that the content may be what they require.

Thus, we have found that parents view the term 'group' more positively, as it is less likely to reflect negatively on them.

## How do we develop 'parenting skills'?

This term is frequently used as a measure of how well parents attend to their parenting duties and responsibilities. The process of acquiring experience and information about being a parent and raising a child is how most parents develop these skills.
Whatever our experience of being parented, we still have to develop our own skills when we become parents and quickly realise that raising children can be complicated, in that each child may require a different approach.

Therefore, developing skills is a long-term process that draws on our own experience of being parented, our experience of being a parent and the information that we acquire from a range of other sources.

Young people also gain from exploring with their peers what parenting means to them and their parents. This helps to make sense of the skills they may need in the future when they in turn become parents. Such preparation courses, run on the principles described above, also help young people to make more informed judgements about when they choose to have children.

Like any acquired skill it needs to be used and added to all the time in order to develop confidence about using it. Many parents have a lot of parenting skills they are not always aware of, nor are they given the opportunity to recognise the full extent of those skills. Reaffirmation of these skills is an important part of building on them and realising their full potential.

Parents frequently feel that they are being judged on their parenting skills and may feel reluctant to admit that they may need some help. Creating an environment in which they can discuss their concerns and learn from each other is one of the most effective ways of allowing parents to reaffirm their role, gain confidence and realise the extent of their own parenting skills. In such an environment, skills can be built on and acquired both positively and confidently.

## How did we monitor and evaluate our work?

Throughout the project we have placed great importance on monitoring, reviewing and evaluating our work. From the beginning we have built in procedures to the work to ensure that valuable lessons and information were fed back into the process.

We have done this by using a variety of techniques, which were designed to minimise intrusion and to be as user friendly as possible.

Project staff kept records of their weekly activities. Parents and young people provided their views on the project through external evaluations, at workshops and seminars.

Information gathered in this manner was published in several reports:

Supporting Parents, Supporting Parenting. First Year Report

Supporting Parents, Supporting Parenting. Second Year Report

Giving Parents a Voice. A children's rights issue

**Individual Project Reports**

Children and Families in Rural Angus

Silverknowes Parents' Room

Rosemount Family Learning Centre

Everyone who was involved in the project received a quarterly newsletter providing information about current parenting issues as well as updates about the activities engaged in by each group. Partner organisations were regularly consulted and kept fully informed about the work of the project and were encouraged to evaluate and guide developments.

This multi-layered collaborative approach has ensured the sustainability of many of the initiatives we created. Parenthood education is now included in the curriculum of a number of schools in Angus. Health visitors in Rosemount are currently making arrangements to continue supporting parents who attend weekly baby clinics.

In Pilton and Kirriemuir, parent support groups have decided to become constituted so that they can independently fund raise for programmes of activities they will run themselves. The parent managed Blackburn Family Centre is engaged in a study of how they can reach more parents in the community.

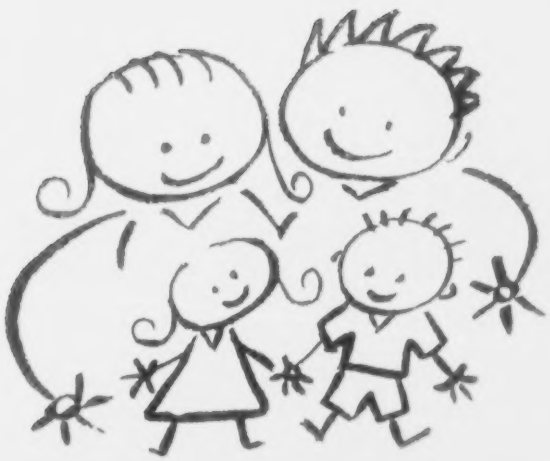
A wealth of materials, including reports, information leaflets, training packs and videos have been produced which will be useful to other parenting initiatives.

We hope that the lessons learned by Save the Children's National Parenting Project will contribute to the future provision of parenting support in Scotland. A recent mapping exercise Supporting Parenting in Scotland, commissioned by the Scottish Office in 1998 supports many of the recommendations we have detailed in this our Final Report.

We endorse the reports recommendations that 'there should be a co-ordinated approach to the development of support to parenting at local and national levels' and that such initiatives 'should draw on the expertise and needs of parents themselves'.

Elizabeth Cutting
National Co-ordinator
Positive Parenting Project

October 1999



Save the Children

Published by Save the Children Scotland
Haymarket House, 8 Clifton Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5DR Tel: 0131 527 8200 Fax: 0131 527 8201 E-mail: scotland@scfuk.org.uk
© Save the Children 1999. Registered Charity no. 213890

All rights reserved, no part of the publication may be transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of the publisher.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE